



Connecting Our State: An Update for Wisconsin on Four Years of Broadband Progress

By Public Service Commission Chairperson, Rebecca Cameron Valcq

Access to high-speed, broadband internet has never been more important. Affordable and reliable broadband is a critical component of education, telemedicine, agriculture, tourism, telework, and economic development. The inequities that stem from the lack of internet connectivity were exacerbated by the pandemic but certainly existed before. For our state to reach its true potential, everyone must be able to use this essential service.

Before I was appointed Chairperson of the Public Service Commission (PSC) at the beginning of 2019, meager investments were made to expand broadband internet. Many saw this vital service as more of a luxury than a necessity.

That changed when Governor Tony Evers and I made broadband access for all a top priority. We backed that commitment with historic investments to expand high-speed internet throughout the state. We brought people together and figured out how we can better connect the unserved and underserved areas of Wisconsin.

Since then, we have awarded nearly \$300 million in projects to bring expanded or improved service to over 387,000 Wisconsin homes and businesses. A large portion of that was \$105 million in federal funding that Gov. Evers specifically directed to this purpose. Recently, Gov. Evers announced that he would commit an additional \$40 million to further connect homes, farms, and businesses in our state.

I am grateful that Gov. Evers continues to provide state and federal resources to expand broadband in Wisconsin. We hear from folks every day that it is making a real difference in peoples' lives.

At the PSC, we take tremendous pride in our work to bring broadband to folks across the state. Our broadband grant program is efficient and effective, with robust internal controls and a high standard of integrity. So much so, we were recently nationally recognized and named "Best in Class" for our state grant program by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

If you are reading this and wondering, "When will broadband make it to my home and community?" Reach out to the PSC. Learn about ways to get involved in this process. Know that we are at a critical point to connect all and help is coming. Wisconsin could soon stand to see \$1 billion of funding from the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to expand infrastructure and make sure that all Wisconsinites see the benefits of broadband internet.

The pace of our progress to connect all in our state has quickened over the past four years. However, there isn't time to rest on our laurels. In the coming years, we intend to redouble our efforts to reach all communities in the state and make sure that all can access and effectively use this vital service.

If you're having trouble finding broadband in your area, call the PSC at 1-800-225-7729 to speak with someone who can help.

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the PSC or any other individual Commissioner.